



Progress Report on Gender Gap Research Project

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At its September meeting, the Commission expressed interest in obtaining partners and funding support to pursue comprehensive gender gap research. CPEC staff contacted several researchers associated with public policy or higher education research institutions. These researchers agreed to consult informally with CPEC about this project. Along with representatives from the K-12 and higher education communities, they have already provided assistance in formulating requests for support and making a compelling case that such research should be funded.

Based on these discussions, the most attractive strategy for securing partners for a joint initiative is to explore the pathway from K-12 education to college in order to identify factors that contribute to the gender gap at the college level. An alternative research approach — focusing on the workforce implications of the gender gap — was seen as problematic because it would be extremely difficult to establish clear linkages between the gender gap and workforce outcomes due to multiple confounding variables.

By framing the research in the context of existing concerns related to race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, the Commission is more likely to attract funding partners. Researchers and education experts note that there is little current research on the interaction between gender and these classic “achievement gap” issues. While there are differing opinions on a specific research approach, experts are in general agreement that so long as the research is structured to disentangle the effects of different variables on overall student success, it would be valuable. They also agreed on the importance of examining K-12 influences *before* the last year or two of high school. While it may be difficult to obtain data on K-12 students, it is critical to do so in order to really understand what is happening in the K-12 environment.

The following are several possible research questions. We will continue to consult with appropriate research experts to refine the questions, construct a research strategy, and pursue funding partners. CPEC staff has already made preliminary contacts with several foundations, including the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation, to explore their interest in funding such research. At the next Commission meeting, we hope to have more information on the prospects for funding.

Potential Research Questions

(Note: these are very preliminary; they would be supported with background information and additional details prior to submission to funding entities. Other questions may be developed as this project moves forward.)

1. How, and to what extent, is gender related to the academic achievement and college readiness of K-12 students who are also affected by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic factors commonly associated with the persistent “achievement gap?” “College readiness” should be considered from the standpoint of both “eligibility” and “attitude or orientation.”

2. Do race/ethnicity and socioeconomic factors correlate to differential outcomes for males and females in college preparation, eligibility rates, applications, admissions, and completion of degrees? If so, how and to what extent?
3. What are the critical points in K-12 education where gender influences students' potential to: a) remain in school through high school graduation, and b) graduate from high school with sufficient credits, grades, and test scores required for college eligibility? Is it possible to prevent or remedy negative effects which may be experienced by a particular gender (such as underrepresentation in high school graduation, and eligibility for and success in college)?
4. To what extent are K-12 teachers prepared to consider and address the influence of gender on student achievement and to assist students in overcoming gender obstacles in pursuing their educational objectives? What data and resources are available to inform them? What kind of pre-service training and in-service professional development are available to address these issues? Is such training research-driven?
5. To what extent is awareness of gender differentials incorporated into existing academic preparation and outreach programs that seek to address the "achievement gap" and qualify more underrepresented students for entrance to and success in higher education? To what extent has the role of gender been considered in program design and implementation? How could these programs be avenues for reducing the gender gap in college-bound students and in higher education?